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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1936

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U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Listeners, you will probably think that our Washington correspondent has her dates mixed when I tell you that she is writing this week about Christmas preparations. But maybe when you hear her news, you'll agree that you may as well invite Santa Claus to take part in the fall preserving.

"I have always been a firm believer in doing your Christmas shopping early," writes our correspondent, "but recently I have gone that idea one better. I am now in favor of doing your Christmas making even earlier, for I have come to realize that some of the very nicest gifts have to be made earlier -- or not at all.

"This idea came to me one day not long ago when I was watching a worker at the Bureau of Home Economics preserving fall fruits in various ways. She had on hand such fall fruits as pears and peaches, crabapples, grapes and green tomatoes. At the time I dropped in, she happened to be finishing up some gingered pears. I had a look at them and a taste. Right then the thought came to me: 'What a welcome Christmas gift a jar of those good-looking delicious pears would be to many people I know! And what an inexpensive present, too! Then I began to think how many other home-preserved fruits would make ideal greetings for the same occasion.

"You know what a dent Christmas usually makes in the pocketbook -- a dent that you don't fully realize until the January bills come in. This idea of planning for Christmas during the fall preserving season when fruits are plentiful and cheap is one way of easing up on Christmas expenses and at the same time making most satisfactory gifts.

"Take gingered pears, for example. I thought how pleased my two cousins who live in a city apartment would be to find a jar of those pears on the mantel Christmas morning with a card attached suggesting these served with cream cheese and crisp crackers.

"This happens to be a good year for pears. They are generally plentiful and not expensive at the markets. You can make gingered pears either of the large Keiffers or the little Seckels, whichever you please. If you want to make quite a supply -- enough for your own pantry as well as to give away -- here are proportions worked out by the Bureau of Home Economics: 8 pounds of prepared fruit..... 4 to 6 pounds of sugar..... 8 to 12 pieces of ginger root.....

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4 lemons, thinly sliced. If you are using large pears, wash and peel them, remove the hard centers, and cut into small pieces. Combine them with sugar in alternate layers and allow them to stand overnight to draw out the juice. Now cook the pear-and-sugar mixture slowly to boiling. Add the ginger and lemon. Boil rapidly until tender and a rich amber in color. Pour into sterilized jars and seal. Delicious, good-looking, easy to make, inexpensive -- what more could you ask of a Christmas gift? And you can put up your gift jars at the same time you are preserving for the family's winter supply.

"The little Seckel pears you can preserve whole. Remove the blossom end but not the stem or skin. Cook the pears in sugar-and-water sirup -- 3/4 to 1 pound of sugar and 1 cup of water for each pound of fruit. Add half a lemon, sliced, to each pound of fruit. Boil gently until the pears are tender and somewhat clear.

"These little gingered Seckel pears make a nice garnish for a dinner plate. But pickled pears, or peaches, or crabapples are even nicer to serve with the main course at dinner. If you should give away a jar of fruit pickles, you might add a card suggesting that these make good company for baked ham. The home economics people who are working on food preservation explained to me that pickled fruits are simply small, firm fruits, preserved whole in a sirup of vinegar, water, sugar and spice. They report that whole spices give the best flavor and appearance. They use whole cloves and allspice and stick cinnamon, tied together loosely in a cheesecloth. When the fruit has boiled tender and stood overnight to absorb the sirup and grow plump, they drain off the sirup and remove the bag of spices. They pack the fruit carefully in sterilized jars, then bring the sirup to the boiling point and pour it over the fruit before sealing the jars.

"Speaking of economy in Christmas presents, here's an idea. Some fall fruits, especially apples and grapes, will do double duty by making first jelly and then butter. So how about a twosome gift made from the same batch of fruit -- a package holding a glass of apple or grape jelly along with a little jar of apple or grape butter? Your card might bring greetings for winter breakfasts.

"Mention of breakfasts reminds me of another gift idea for a bachelor friend. If you have some very small jars -- just large enough to hold a couple of servings of marmalade, you might fill these when you are making preserves or marmalades for the family. Then pack an assortment of breakfast spreads -- perhaps 4 tiny jars in a gift box. You might have one jar holding green-tomato marmalade, another quince preserves, a third green-gage plum marmalade or orange marmalade, and so on.

"That's just a beginning to all the ideas wandering around my head about Christmas presents made during the preserving season. But you probably have specialties of your own that are quite as good as any I can suggest. I just want to remind Mr. Santa Claus that none of the makings of these gifts are expensive at this time of year, especially for people who have their own fruit, and none of these fruit products are difficult to make either. Finally they are gifts that don't take much time if you put them up along with your regular job of preserving for the family's winter food supply."

That finishes our correspondent's first Christmas letter of 1936.

